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Reconceptualizing Field Research in Political Science

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Summary and Keywords

Generations of political scientists have set out for destinations near and far to pursue field research. Even in a digitally networked era, the researcher's personal presence and engagement with the field context continue to be essential. Yet exactly what does fieldwork mean, what is it good for, and how can scholars make their time in the field as reflective and productive as possible? Thinking of field research in broad terms—as leaving one's home institution to collect information, generate data, and/or develop insights that significantly inform one's research—reveals that scholars of varying epistemological commitments, methodological bents, and substantive foci all engage in fieldwork. Moreover, they face similar challenges, engage in comparable practices, and even follow similar principles. Thus, while every scholar's specific project is unique, we also have much to learn from each other.

In preparing for and conducting field research, political scientists connect the high-level fundamentals of their research design with the practicalities of day-to-day inquiry. While in the field, they take advantage of the multiplicity of opportunities that the field setting provides and often triangulate by cross-checking among different perspectives or data sources. To a large extent, they do not regard initial research design decisions as final; instead, they iteratively update concepts, hypotheses, the research question itself, and other elements of their projects—carefully justifying these adaptations—as their fieldwork unfolds. Incorporating what they are learning in a dynamic and ongoing fashion, while also staying on task, requires both flexibility and discipline.

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Political scientists are increasingly writing about the challenges of special types of field environments (such as authoritarian regimes or conflict settings) and about issues of positionality that arise from their own particular identities interacting with those of the people they study or with whom they work. So too, they are grappling with what it means to conduct research in a way that aligns with their ethical commitments, and what the possibilities and limits of research transparency are in relation to fieldwork. In short, political scientists have joined other social scientists in undertaking critical reflection on what they do in the field—and this self-awareness is itself a hallmark of high-quality research.

Keywords: field research, fieldwork, research design, data collection, ethics, triangulation, iteration

Introduction

More information about politics around the world becomes available online with each passing day. Governments digitize parliamentary proceedings, ministry documents, and the contents of national archives. Social movements use “Facebook to mobilize, Twitter to coordinate protests, and YouTube to tell the world” (Arafa & Armstrong, 2016, p. 73). Even many local newspapers and radio programs are available on the Web. Yet despite the wealth of information that the digital revolution has placed at our fingertips, being present in the places where politics plays out remains critical to our ability to understand and gain insight into political processes. There is simply no substitute for good field research.

Why is that so? Much information, of course, is not digital and never will be. Moreover, by relying on prepackaged, digital sources, we risk becoming trapped by the biases, limitations, and assumptions of those who compile data and put it on Web servers (Jerven, 2013). Much research involving human participants—most forms of interviews and observation, and many kinds of surveys and experiments—simply cannot be done without face-to-face contact. A scholar may have the means to inexpensively cold-call someone in Kolkata (or Kankakee) these days, but without establishing a human connection and a baseline of background, credibility, and trust, what is learned might be limited. On-the-ground presence can be essential, as well, for obtaining a realistic sense of whether general concepts and theories apply in local circumstances. Relatedly, it is often by confronting realities in the field that we identify opportunities for innovation and new theoretical contributions. For these reasons and many more, fieldwork is essential in political science research.

Political scientists who conduct field research do not fit into just one mold, however. The image of a comparativist trooping off to a far-flung locale for a year to conduct qualitative interviews and “soak and poke,” to use Fenno’s (1978, p. xiv) term, is more of a stubborn stereotype than a reality. Field researchers in political science are diverse with regard to their subfields, the substance of their inquiries, their analytic approaches, and their epistemologies and methodologies. They operate in field sites around the corner, and around the world, from their home institutions, for very short and very long periods of time, and employ many different data collection techniques.

Despite this diversity, field researchers in political science have a great deal in common with one another. They face similar types of dilemmas, for instance, in meshing the theoretical requirements of a research design with the practical and ethical demands of the field. They are also masters at problem-solving and adaptation—skills needed to react to unanticipated conditions or events in the field. Most fieldworkers spend substantial time and effort developing networks of contacts and sometimes collaborative

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relationships to facilitate entrée into their field sites, and many work in contexts made challenging by practical or political circumstances.

In this article, we offer a new conceptualization of field research, understanding it to include a broader and more heterogeneous array of activities than conventional wisdom suggests. Building on this broader notion of fieldwork, we provide an overview of some of the common challenges that political scientists face while preparing for and operating in the field, subsequently focusing in on the difficult contexts and ethical dilemmas that confront many field researchers. Next, we discuss how fieldwork involves the simultaneous collection and analysis of information, and the continuous updating and refining of one's field research design, a process that we refer to as "analytic iteration," or simply "iteration." In conclusion, we suggest that a set of six principles can guide the practice of field research so that it is efficient, effective, and rewarding, producing the valuable insights that only fieldwork can deliver. In exploring these issues, this article draws in part on a survey of the discipline, referred to throughout this entry as the Field Research in Political Science (FRPS) survey, as well as qualitative interviews, both of which were conducted for a recent book (Kapiszewski, MacLean, & Read, 2015).¹

Redefining Field Research

What exactly *is* field research? Fieldwork is rarely defined explicitly in methodological works,² but a handful of authors have offered explicit definitions. Each of these definitions captures an important element of what fieldwork means to *some* who undertake it, but also sharply limits the scope of what qualifies as fieldwork. Wood (2007, p. 123), for instance, defines it as "research based on personal interaction with research subjects in their own setting." Featherman (2006, p. xviii) suggests field research involves crossing cultural boundaries, "taking social science questions or hypothetical propositions constructed about one societal or cultural setting into another." Some anthropologists equate field research with ethnography.³ Recent accounts of ethnographic methods by political scientists have highlighted the benefits of immersion in the field context and explained how the "insights into actors' lived experiences" that scholars gather in the field can contribute to the study of politics (Wedeen, 2010, p. 261; see also Schatz, 2009). Reflecting an anthropological perspective, Shaffir and Stebbins (1991, p. 5) assert that "fieldwork is carried out by immersing oneself in a collective way of life for the purpose of gaining firsthand knowledge about a major facet of it." Useful though these conceptions are, they exclude some forms of field-based inquiry and thus obscure commonalities among the large and diverse group of political researchers who carry out inquiries that they understand to constitute field research.

Our definition is broader and more inclusive. By field research, we mean leaving one's home institution in order to collect information, generate data, and/or develop insights that significantly inform one's research. For us, field research does not necessarily entail

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going to a foreign country or even an unfamiliar locale. Also, contrary to the common notion that genuine fieldwork entails stays of a year or at least many months, we note that political scientists often conduct field research during shorter trips.⁴ Further, fieldwork need not involve extensive interpersonal interaction: our conceptualization includes such techniques as archival research and observation. As soon as a scholar enters and engages with a context where the political decisions, events, and dynamics that interest her took place or are recorded in order to gather evidence related to her research—even just requesting documents from an archivist or collecting maps from a government agency—she has begun to do field research.⁵

Importantly, fieldwork does not fall exclusively within the domain of qualitative research. Techniques that typically generate qualitative data (e.g., ethnography or interviews) and those that usually produce quantitative data (e.g., face-to-face surveys and field experiments) can and do form part of field research; each involves going out into the world to collect information, generate data, and/or develop insights. Fieldwork is, conventional wisdom notwithstanding, the province of all subfields, not merely comparative politics: among respondents to the 2011–2012 FRPS survey who had completed (or nearly completed) at least one field research project, 34% identified comparative politics as their primary subfield, 26% were Americanists, and 17% were international relations specialists, for instance.⁶ Fieldwork, in other words, is not defined by the length of time spent in a remote context, by data-collection technique, by methodology, or by subfield: It belongs to no one type of scholar and can potentially belong to all types.

To establish this shared category is not to ignore important distinctions among field researchers. Most fundamentally, scholars' epistemological commitments condition how they design their research and think about its goals, how they operate in the field and view their own position in the research process, and what they consider to be the standards for rigorous inquiry. Researchers on the positivist side of the spectrum might see the primary goal of field research as generating reliable and valid data to draw cogent descriptive inferences or evaluate competing hypotheses, perhaps with the aim of identifying general relationships among concepts. Interpretivists may reject some or all of those aims and assumptions, searching instead for deep understanding of political actors and processes, striving for an emic perspective and avoiding an etic imposition of concepts and terms.⁷ Beyond this distinction, scholars within the positivist and interpretivists approaches employ different analytic methods in their research, scholars from different subfields bring different assumptions to their work, and so on.

While these distinctions exist and are important, field researchers do not always fall neatly into the categories that the discipline has sought to establish. While some scholars have fixed commitments, many field researchers are epistemologically versatile. Working across presumed cleavages and pushing methodological boundaries, they take cues and draw pragmatically from multiple research traditions, combining quantitative, qualitative, and/or interpretive methodologies—frequently contemporaneously—as they pursue their projects.⁸ There is a considerable gray area where scholars of different epistemological

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and methodological bents can and do productively use—and work together to develop and strengthen—fieldwork’s diverse practices, and articulate its contributions to political science. The existence of this gray area highlights the importance of defining field research in a way that captures its essence for all political scientists. When it comes to fieldwork, we are not as profoundly different from one another as disciplinary lines and categories might suggest.

Preparing for and Designing Field Research

Due in part to their commonalities, scholars often face similar intellectual and practical challenges when preparing for field research. Unfortunately, political scientists have few resources to help them effectively prepare. Only a minority of graduate programs offer a course on field research, and few other opportunities exist to learn about preparing (or conducting) fieldwork.⁹ Thus, while most political scientists have taken one or more courses in how to analyze statistical data, few have had instruction on how to prepare to collect information and generate data or on how to carry out those tasks in the field. Further, the scholarship on field research in political science has only recently begun to grow, and existing scholarship tends to be narrowly focused on a particular technique or context rather than treating the overall challenges of preparing for and conducting fieldwork.¹⁰ The discipline's rich literature on research design likewise tends not to address field dimensions, and the steps that scholars take to prepare for fieldwork are rarely discussed in their published, written products. Thus information about how to prepare for, design, and conduct field research is most often passed informally among graduate students and between some graduate students and their advisors, resulting in a very uneven and incomplete transfer of knowledge.

This disciplinary neglect notwithstanding, preparation and careful design are critical to the effective conduct of field research. Small missteps and oversights that could be avoided through thoughtful preparation can have expensive, time-consuming, and stressful consequences. Of course, not everything can be planned—fieldworkers inevitably encounter unanticipated obstacles and need to engage in on-the-spot problem-solving. Nonetheless, decisions taken in such moments—which may not be able to be remade and can have critical implications—will be better informed, and simply better, the more time and effort that scholars have invested in preparing, in a variety of ways, for work in the field.

While each field researcher negotiates the challenges that preparing for fieldwork poses differently, it is possible to identify a set of strategies of relevance for most. For instance, developing a network of contacts who can provide advice or assistance with one's project (i.e., a research network)—including scholars who work in a similar substantive area at one's home institution, in one's discipline, within one's field context, but also well beyond it—can be very useful for learning more about one's research topic, as well as for garnering fieldwork pointers. Also, establishing a research affiliation in the field setting can be helpful intellectually and socially and can aid in establishing credibility (although choosing this affiliation should be done with great care). Researchers who will involve human participants in their work need to have their project approved by their Institutional Review Board (IRB) and also must determine if any additional formal research permits are required or any informal approval processes must be followed. In addition, most scholars need to apply for funding, an increasingly challenging undertaking involving submitting multiple proposals to diverse types of funding sources

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(e.g., university units, government agencies, and foundations). Researchers also can prepare a set of relevant materials—from their “30-second pitch” to templates for interview requests to interview protocols and survey questionnaires—in advance of departing for the field.

The central intellectual task involved in preparing for fieldwork is field research design. Designing research and designing field research—developing a practical plan for implementing one’s research design—are linked yet distinct processes, and each is critical for successful empirical inquiry. One fundamental set of field research design decisions concerns the overall structure of the field research: how many field sites there will be, how many trips to take to each, when to take those trips, and how long to spend on each trip. The particularities of each research project affect the answers to such questions. Certain kinds of projects necessitate long stays, such as when the locale is unfamiliar to the researcher, when a large volume of archival material must be collected, when the project requires patiently building access to difficult-to-reach informants, when an extended program of interviews or ethnography is needed, or when the design and execution of a survey or field experiment require extensive preparation and testing. In other cases—such as when the goal is to conduct a precisely targeted set of interviews to adjudicate hypotheses concerning why a policy decision was made, or to investigate the mechanism behind a causal relationship that has been established—one or a few short field stays suffice.

Long trips can be valuable for building deep familiarity with a research site and a large network of contacts—yet not every scholar has the time and resources to undertake such work, and not every research question requires such extensive fieldwork. On the other hand, shorter trips of two to five weeks may fit well into a researcher’s institutional or family commitments. Less time in the field also motivates scholars to maintain an efficient pace of data collection. Also, many shorter trips may be required if the research involves multiple sites, observation over time, or other forms of immersion. It is very common for political scientists to take a short exploratory trip in the early phases of a project to sharpen the research question and determine what kind of data can be collected and how to go about collecting them. The overall amount of time spent in the field must be proportional to the task undertaken and the role that fieldwork plays in the project.

Scholars also need to decide just how they will undertake research in each field site. Effectively designing field research requires structuring the project in a way that reflects significant knowledge of the research topic and the field contexts, anticipates the methods that will be used to analyze data generated in the field, and takes multiple other factors and pressures—financial, personal, and psychological, to name just a few—into account.

To be clear, field research design is not an isolated stage of the research process that is fully completed prior to entering the field. Because fieldwork is a fundamentally iterative enterprise, field research design continues after the researcher arrives in the field. Consequently, scholars should adopt a flexible approach to field research design during

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predeparture preparation. While they should seek to make their plans as detailed as possible, deciding on some parameters of fieldwork will require information that scholars lack prior to being on the ground. A good strategy is to identify critical choice points at which key decisions will need to be made—for instance, case selection among particular cities or economic sectors—enumerate options to consider, outline the logic by which decisions will be made and the factors that will affect them, and list the information required to make such decisions and how it can be obtained. It is often useful to have one or more alternative plans (addressing different types of contingencies) for key aspects of a project.

This flexibility notwithstanding, preparing for fieldwork entails clearly identifying the information that a scholar will need to collect in the field so that she can evaluate central concepts or measure key variables, assess core hypotheses, illuminate causal processes and mechanisms, and distinguish observable implications. Scholars should likewise think through where, how, and in what order to collect information and develop a coordinated set of strategies for doing so. Even researchers who do not think in terms of variables and hypotheses should consider up front what information to gather in the field and how to do so, as well as what they will need to observe (or not observe) on the ground in order to ascertain that they have answered their question or arrived at their interpretation.

Developing a data collection plan can facilitate these tasks. Table 1 and Figure 1 represent two examples, although many adaptations and alternatives are possible.¹¹ Formulating a data collection plan requires that scholars think carefully about what precisely they intend to examine, how to conceptualize it, and how to measure or evaluate it; doing so helps them move from theorizing abstract concepts to searching for concrete evidence in the field. Table 1 displays a structured, variable-oriented data collection plan. For interpretive scholars who contemplate a less linear research process, in which concepts and key pieces of evidence for meaning-making emerge from the context and from respondents' understanding thereof (Schwartz-Shea & Yanow, 2012), a more open-ended approach to planning, such as the cycle outlined in Figure 1, might prove more useful.

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Table 1. Example of a Structured and Variable-Oriented Data Collection Plan

	Research Design			Field Research Design			
	Concept	Subdimensions of Concept	Operationalization (Measures/indicators)	What Data Needed to Evaluate/measure	Where and How (Location of Data and Data Collection Techniques)	When (Data Collection Sequencing During Field Stay)	How Long (Time Data Collection Will Take)
Outcome (DV)	Democracy	Participation	Voting participation (percentage of citizens that registered/voted)	Data on voter registration and participation rates over time	Request from National Electoral Commission	Before departure or upon arrival	2 weeks
				Expert opinion on voting patterns'	Interviews with experts	Months 5-6	2 months

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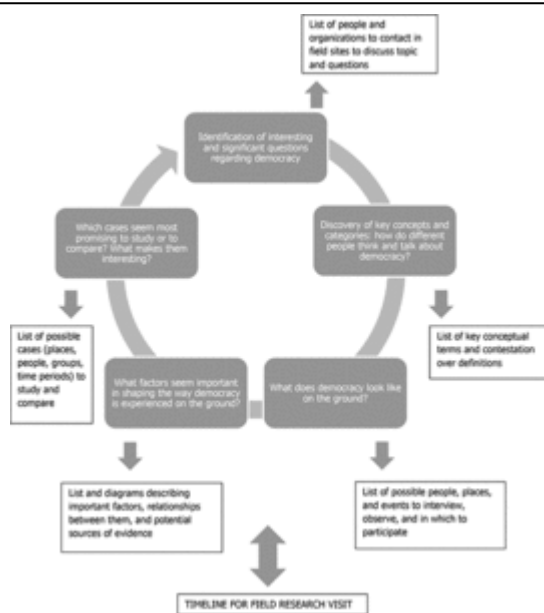
			Contacting of local officials	Citizens' contacting behavior	Interviews with citizens	Months 5-6	2 months
		Competition	Number of political parties	Electoral data over time	Request from National Electoral Commission	Before departure or upon arrival	2 months
			Opposition share of state assembly	Electoral/ government data	Request from government offices; download from government Web sites	Months 2-3	1 week
			Number of alternations of chief minister	Secondary sources	Access in library	Before departure	1 week
Explanatory Factor #1 (IV)	Education	Literacy	Adults' and children's ability to read	World Bank Development Indicators (adult literacy/ primary)	Download from World Bank Web site	Before departure	1 day

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				school enrollment rates over time)			
				Government data	Request from Ministry of Education	Month 1	1 week
		Civic literacy	Knowledge of civic institutions	Citizens' views	Interviews with citizens	Months 3-4	2 months
Explanatory Factor #2 (IV)	Variation in economic development at regional level	Size of regional economy	Gross domestic product	National and state government data	Request from Ministries of Finance	Months 4-5	Several weeks
		Poverty at household level	Number of people living below the poverty line	National and state government data	Request from Ministries of Economy	Months 4-5	Several weeks
Explanatory Factor #3 (IV)	Class structure	Size of the middle class	Number of people in the third and fourth	World Bank Development Indicators	Download from World Bank Web site	Before departure	2 months

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			quintiles of income				
			Number of people who own a television	Expert opinion	Interviews with local economists and sociologists	Months 4-5	3 months



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Figure 1. Example of an open-ended or explanatory data collection plan.

Entering the field with a well-developed plan of either type helps scholars to clarify research tasks, manage objectives, and assess how the information that they are gathering relates to and is advancing their inquiry. Put differently, it aids in keeping data collection and the details of fieldwork linked to the larger intellectual project. Further, both types of plan can be periodically updated as scholars gain more knowledge and

continue to develop their research design in the field. Generating these plans and taking the other steps outlined here should help to bridge what is often a considerable gap between the way that political scientists think of and design their work in advance of entering the field, and the way that they actually conduct their inquiry once there.

Operating in the Field

Collecting data in the field inevitably entails a seemingly unending series of unexpected problems, new opportunities, and difficult choices. These run the gamut from obtaining access to research subjects, to recruiting research assistants, to maintaining the independence of treatment and control groups in experiments. Developing strategies to clear these hurdles often requires adapting general methods to local circumstances, taking into account practical considerations. How can one convince police in authoritarian China to answer questions (Scoggins, 2014)? How can one make the most out of a short interview with a busy member of the Washington elite (Beckmann & Hall, 2013)? How can one conduct a survey in an environment of intense fear and skepticism toward researchers (Tessler & Jamal, 2006)?

The way that scholars address these practical questions can have important consequences for the value of the data that they generate and insights that they garner in the field. Indeed, one of fieldwork's most challenging aspects is that it requires scholars to wear two hats simultaneously: to serve as the principal investigator (PI), or intellectual leader of the project, and to serve as the project manager (PM), who attends to logistical, budgetary, personnel, and timeline issues. Playing these roles concurrently can pull

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researchers in competing directions. Also, few graduate students and faculty receive training on how to handle the management demands of a field research project. One useful strategy is to read scholarship based on fieldwork, the best of which illustrates the resourcefulness and innovation required to meet the challenges posed by conducting field research in particular contexts. For instance, stimulating and detailed contributions can be found in research within the United States (Fenno, 1978, 1986; Soss, 2006) and overseas (Ward, 1964; Scott, 1985; Wedeen, 1999; Wood, 2000, 2003). Following, adapting, and expanding the data collection plan that a scholar began to develop prior to entering the field also can help her to ensure that the microresearch tasks that she is carrying out are advancing her project's overall intellectual goals.

One imperative to which most field researchers must attend immediately upon arrival in (and ideally have begun to consider prior to entering) the field site is gaining *entrée*—access to places in which she would like to work, the people with whom she wishes to speak, or both. Doing so often requires deep knowledge of the field context. Scholars continue to increase their mastery of the research topic and the context once they arrive in the field by reading local newspapers, working papers, policy documents, and other primary materials. Researchers can get in touch with the people on their initial list of contacts and work to expand their networks of informants at the field sites. Often, they start with local scholars at nearby universities, think tanks, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), or their host affiliate institutions. Attending academic conferences or workshops also can be a fruitful avenue for getting the lay of the land and meeting useful contacts in person. Some field contexts may require that scholars obtain formal research permits and navigate official hierarchies in order to access the people with whom they wish to speak; in other places, scholars may need to engage in a series of informal meetings or introductions. Importantly, gaining *entrée* is not a discrete task that is completed early on, once and for all. Often, scholars begin the relevant negotiations well before arriving in the field and continue to navigate and negotiate access throughout, and, sometimes even after, the field stay.

Operating in the field also may have a collaborative aspect. While many scholars conduct field research solo, many others work with colleagues from other institutions, firms, and organizations or hire local research assistants (RAs). Collaboration can have both advantages and disadvantages that must be carefully weighed and negotiated throughout the field project. For instance, collaborating with a well-known, respected entity can help a researcher to develop greater trust and rapport with project participants, and do so more rapidly. Partners also can facilitate access to local data sets, archives, or gray literature that are not available online and may augment a scholar's understanding of security and logistics in the field context.

Realizing these advantages requires careful partner selection based on a nuanced understanding of the potential partner's role and profile in the field site. A survey firm may be well known as linked to one or another political party, for example; an NGO's reputation, whether heroic or unsavory, may precede it. The scholar's reputation, in turn, may be tainted by a partner's bad track record in a locality: selecting a partner perceived

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as partisan or untrustworthy, for example, can adversely affect the researchers' ability to open doors and develop rapport. Moreover, working with any partner requires additional time for coordination and reduces the researcher's independence.

A few political scientists have written articles reflecting on the challenges, opportunities, and trade-offs that integrating partners into their project presented. For instance, scholars who conduct surveys have discussed how to weigh the costs and benefits of contracting out the labor to a professional survey organization (obtaining bids, choosing a vendor, writing up a contract, and so forth) against those involved in training a team of enumerators (Tsai, 2010; Kapiszewski, MacLean, & Read, 2015, pp. 282–285). Field experimenters, who often work with partner organizations—for instance, to evaluate the effectiveness of a particular intervention—have carefully considered the trade-offs involved in doing so (Gueron, 2002; Duflo, Glennerster, & Kremer, 2006; Humphreys & Weinstein, 2009; Humphreys, 2011; List, 2011).

Some scholars' most important partnerships take the form of hired RAs. Before recruiting RAs, scholars should consider the kinds of skills and level of education that would be most appropriate for the range of tasks that the research team needs to carry out. Aspects of social identity such as gender, ethnicity, age, and social class also might affect the RA's ability to play particular roles in a research project. Whereas Fujii (2009) chose an interpreter who would not be quickly stereotyped as belonging to a particular ethnic category in Rwanda, Cammett (2013) intentionally matched assistants with respondent groups in terms of salient markers of ethnic and religious identity in Lebanon. Researchers should clearly communicate with RAs concerning exactly what is expected of them; develop a structure of compensation that provides incentives for effective completion of required tasks; and train them on the research objectives, the social science rationale behind the project's methods, and principles for ethical research. Actively monitoring, supervising, and managing RAs throughout the research process likewise is essential. Engendering a strong sense of team spirit among RAs and providing them with professional development support and other assistance (perhaps even after leaving the field site) are examples of practices that make this kind of collaboration fulfilling and mutually beneficial.

Addressing the logistical and managerial challenges that fieldwork presents may seem straightforward. However, almost all the decisions that scholars make while operating in the field involve choosing among multiple options, and these choices have important consequences for the quality of the evidence that is collected in the field. For example, choices about where to live or what type of transportation to use to get around the field site can provide signals to study participants and influence the levels of access that scholars are able to obtain to people, places, or materials. Thinking through the intellectual dimensions and implications of the operational choices that one makes in the field—i.e., juggling the PI and PM roles and the potential trade-offs that underlie them—can be exhausting, but it is unavoidable. Making well-considered choices both provides a strong foundation for the project and generates a sense of accomplishment. The data

collection plan can serve as a touchstone as scholars make these important choices, helping them to see how their practical decisions interact with the intellectual infrastructure of their project.

Iteratively Collecting and Analyzing Data

Once in the field, a researcher spends much of her time gathering information using data collection techniques such as interviewing, archival research, ethnography, surveys, and field experiments. Each of these techniques has been discussed in depth in Kapiszewski, MacLean, and Read (2015, pp. 151–331) and by other scholars. For instance, more specialized accounts address issues in interviewing (Mosley, 2013), archival research (Hill, 1993; Frisch, Harris, Kelly, & Parker, 2012), ethnography (Schatz, 2009),¹² survey research (Townsend, Sombat, & Jordan, 2013), and field experiments (Gerber & Green, 2012). Nonetheless, fieldwork involves more than merely doing interviews or carrying out a survey. In this section, we discuss the diverse activities that fieldwork entails, showing how political scientists tend to use multiple data collection techniques, and how fieldwork entails shifting among research design, data collection, and data analysis over the course of a project.

As our definition of field research emphasizes, the researcher's personal presence in the milieu under study—or in a context where in-depth information about that milieu can be found—is a key part of what constitutes fieldwork. Being there puts a researcher in a position to learn from the setting in which data are produced or acquired. This could mean learning how an archive was created and organized (an insight that could be gleaned from the arrangement of related boxes of files). It could mean obtaining feedback from specialists based in the country under study while drafting questions for a survey or designing an experiment. Or it could simply mean learning from daily life in a city where one is conducting interviews—reading the newspaper over breakfast, listening to radio news in a taxi, or chatting with friends. For most scholars, the field site is more than just a staging ground for the project; it is an environment that enriches the study in innumerable ways.

Typically, researchers take advantage of the multiplicity of opportunities that the field setting provides by employing more than one data collection technique in their projects, whether in parallel or serially. For example, in the FRPS survey, fully 42% of research projects that employed surveys also use ethnography. Scholars pursuing archival research often obtained key information directly from human participants as well, through interviews and other techniques. Moreover, the survey of the discipline also found that researchers commonly collected published or previously compiled information in various forms (preexisting data sets, newspaper articles, or books) while also generating new data.

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Interviews play a particularly central role in the fieldwork conducted by political scientists. Scholars engage in many different types of interviews, of course, from quasi-ethnographic encounters aimed at deeply exploring subjects' worldviews, to shorter, highly scripted exchanges designed to produce quantitative scores on particular indicators, to relatively casual conversations with subject experts or other scholars. In one form or another, no fewer than 81% of projects reported in the FRPS survey involved interviews in a significant way, and they loomed large in fieldwork undertaken both abroad and closer to home, by political scientists of virtually all subfields. Further, members of our discipline blend interviews liberally with other data collection techniques; thus, even a researcher who comes to a field site with the primary aim of implementing an original survey also will likely conduct interviews in the course of designing, refining, and contextualizing that survey; the same goes for many experimentalists and archival researchers. In short, field sites are rich sources of information, and asking questions in and around them bears fruit in countless ways.

Much of fieldwork's power comes from the opportunities that it provides to cross-check or "triangulate" among different perspectives. This does not necessarily mean using multiple data-collection techniques; triangulation can involve carefully comparing one interviewee's account with those of other interviewees, or determining whether an idea found in one archival source is also present in others. Still, using multiple techniques to collect information represents one approach to triangulation, and allows scholars to continue designing their research and instruments in the field. Both of these practices are common, if not instinctual, for political scientists who conduct fieldwork, and both contribute to its power.

By comparing and cross-checking data generated through separate, independent modes of inquiry—for instance, by seeing if general patterns discovered via a telephone survey are matched (or contradicted) by information garnered through in-depth interviews or participant observation—the researcher can develop a more nuanced picture of the object of inquiry, become aware of biases or limitations of particular sources, and ultimately become more confident in her findings. Applying multiple research techniques also helps scholars to refine the instruments used in, and the deployment of, each technique. For example, reading transcripts from legislative proceedings or listening to conversations of representatives' staff in their offices can help a researcher to improve a semistructured protocol used in interviews with legislators. Indeed, different techniques may play particular roles in the life cycle of a given research project. It is important to keep in mind, however, that pursuing more than one form of data gathering—say, focus groups in addition to structured interviews—adds to the time and preparation that fieldwork requires. Such costs must be weighed against the analytic benefits.

Of course, timing is also important. Relatively open-ended techniques (e.g., interviews, ethnography, and archival research) might make essential contributions earlier in a project, assisting with research design (e.g., choosing or refining a research question, selecting cases, developing approaches to measuring variables, and generating hypotheses), as well as being used liberally throughout a project. By contrast, surveys

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and field experiments are usually appropriate at stages in a project when core concepts, hypotheses, and measures have been solidified and verified. Moreover, changing particular aspects of a study midcourse—such as the form and sequence of survey questions or the treatment in an experiment—can impair the validity of one’s findings. Once a scholar begins to carry out studies of these kinds, there is less latitude for modifications.

Collecting information and generating data that help to answer one’s research question are unarguably central to field research. Yet scholars often begin to collect data long before arriving at their field sites and continue to do so after returning to their home institutions. Likewise, they begin to develop their approach to analysis prior to the field, engage in analysis while in the field, and, of course, continue analyzing thereafter.

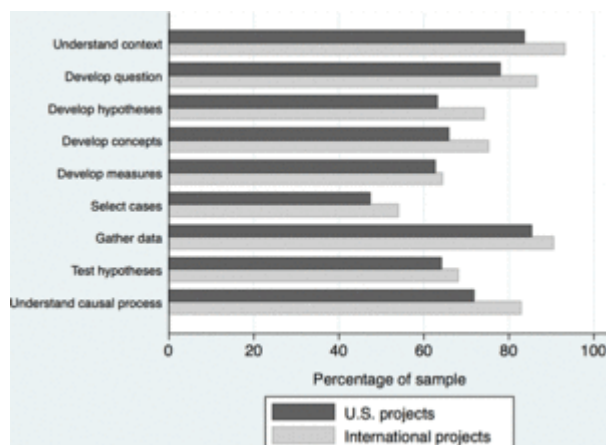
Analysis, as understood here, comprises numerous intellectual tasks and strategies that help researchers to move toward answering their questions. To offer just a few examples, analysis includes reflecting on data-collection experiences (e.g., comparing different people’s reactions to being cold-called with an interview request), considering how to evaluate the evidentiary value of data (perhaps by showing photocopies of government records to someone who was involved in creating similar records), and organizing and processing information (e.g., flagging each occurrence of an essential topic in one’s notes). Creating framework documents and analytic tools such as a glossary of key terms, a timeline of key events, or a list of key actors all qualify as analysis. Beginning to assess what the data suggest about how different cases—be they actors, administrative units within a country, or events—score on particular variables is also a helpful analytic strategy. And, of course, qualitative or quantitative analytic tools and methods can be employed in the field.

Beginning to engage in analysis while in the field produces many benefits. Doing so helps scholars to make sense of what they are absorbing, to identify problems with their research design or data collection techniques and adjust accordingly, and to evaluate their overall progress, gauge how much work remains, and thus allocate their time more effectively. Also, writing up the results of those initial analyses—in short memos to themselves (or, for graduate students, to advisors), conference papers, or chapters—helps scholars to formulate ideas clearly and concretely and consider what precisely they wish to say or show, facilitating analytic progress; if shared, such writing can elicit helpful feedback. Importantly, analyzing while in the field also enables the dynamic updating of elements of research design and the subsequent recalibration of data collection and refinement of analysis. As scholars shift purposively among these tasks, often following both deductive and inductive logic, they strengthen their work.

Evidence drawn from the FRPS survey concerning the analytic tasks that field research facilitates substantiates these claims. Scholars indicated that fieldwork involves much more than just collecting data. In many projects, especially those conducted overseas, it also helped them to develop or refine their research questions, concepts, hypotheses, and

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measures; select cases; understand the research context; test hypotheses; and understand causal processes (see Figure 2).



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Figure 2. Tasks of field research in U.S. and international projects.

In short, designing research, collecting information, and analyzing data rarely fall neatly into the prefield, field, and postfield stages of a project. Shifting from one to the other while conducting fieldwork facilitates the generation of valid inferences and interpretations, enhancing internal validity (Yom, 2015, p. 635). In particular,

designing research in an iterative way—leaving a critical subset of research design elements flexible and negotiable throughout the life of a research project based on fieldwork—allows the clarification of concepts and refinement of measures, the discarding of context-inappropriate hypotheses, and the generation of new ones. It also can inspire the use of previously unconsidered data collection techniques. Analytic iteration can lead to multiple efficiency gains and help field research to yield strong data, insights, and research outcomes. By contrast, ignoring what one is learning and its implications for one’s work—continuing to abide by earlier, ill-conceived design decisions or to pursue theoretically unpromising questions, cases, or explanations—is analytically unproductive and can inhibit the generation of new knowledge and theory. Iteratively developing their research design—and field research design—allows scholars to capitalize on the dynamism of research in the field.

Challenging Contexts and the Researcher’s Positionality

Conducting field research is challenging in any context. However, some field sites present more difficulties than others. For example, locations that lack basic infrastructure, that are ruled by authoritarian regimes, or that are experiencing or have recently experienced conflict all pose particular kinds of obstacles. Other contexts are troublesome in different ways, such as oppressively patriarchal, hostile to lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and questioning (LGBTQ) rights, or not accommodating to various forms of disability. Political scientists have begun to write about complications (and opportunities) related to their own identities (particularly aspects of race and gender) in their research experiences in

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particular sites. All such challenges require careful advance preparation, close attention to on-the-ground conditions, and adaptability during all stages of field research and writing, in order for everyone involved in the project to work effectively and safely.

Conducting research in field sites that lack basic infrastructure such as safe drinking water, paved roads, or electricity may require more time and financial resources, and may even pose significant health risks to researchers. For example, poor-quality roads may complicate travel to different sites or even require substantial resources to buy or hire specialized vehicles. Lack of reliable electricity may compromise a scholar's ability to type up interview notes or access information, charge a cell phone, or store confidential data. Scholars may need to take steps such as bringing their own safe or luggage that can be locked securely or making arrangements to travel regularly to the nearest town with reliable electricity and Internet to upload their data, analysis, and writings.

Carrying out field research in authoritarian contexts also can require extra outlays of time and resources and can imply political risks to scholars, their research assistants, local collaborators, and study participants (Sriram et al., 2009; Goode & Ahram, 2016). Police or security agents of the regime may prevent or detain researchers' entry, exit, or movement around the country or attempt to surveil or seize their notes and documentation.¹³ Such threats and surveillance may expose interview respondents to risk or discourage potential study participants from interacting with researchers or sharing information with them. All protective measures need to be communicated carefully to the people whom a scholar wishes to involve in her research to ensure their ability to make an informed decision to participate. In such contexts, making digital copies and storing materials on servers located outside the country under study can be especially advisable, as can destroying hard copies of materials once digital copies are secure. In countries with extensive Web controls, like China, obtaining unfettered access to the Internet via a virtual private network (VPN) is essential. Finally, everything from topics of research to specific question wordings should be reviewed carefully with local partners to ensure that the project does not run afoul of government constraints or lie outside the bounds of what interviewees or survey respondents can be asked to discuss.

Field research in conflict zones may also involve threats to basic security (Mertus, 2009). Scholars need to assess the situation continually to protect their own safety, as well as that of those they have involved in their work. Indeed, local research assistants, research collaborators, and research subjects may be at greater risk than the researcher, as local team members may be perceived as having a greater stake in and perhaps partiality to a particular side of a political conflict (Smyth, 2005; Mertus, 2009). These risks notwithstanding, associating with organizations that are operating in such contexts or individuals who work there can help researchers obtain access to important information about the current security situation and stay out of harm's way. For instance, they may opt to travel as part of a convoy with other organizations (Paluck, 2009). Even if necessary for safety, researchers must be aware of how these associations may shape study participants' perceptions of them and their role in the conflict.

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Of course, the mental health and psychological protection of the researchers, research team, and study participants are as important as their physical safety (Mertus, 2009). Loyle and Simoni (2017, p. 141) highlight how field researchers who study conflict, violence, and death often experience “research-related trauma.” Scholars working in these types of settings may suffer a range of symptoms, including fatigue, irritability, loss of appetite, insomnia, and social withdrawal. Loyle and Simoni (2017) contend that researchers cannot recover from this trauma alone; scholars and the discipline more broadly must do more to acknowledge and deal openly with the emotional and psychological stress of certain kinds of field research. One way for researchers to cope is to debrief with others who have worked in similar contexts; another is to take breaks from the intellectual substance and geographical sites of the experience. While members of the local research team also may be vulnerable to trauma, they may have access to more extensive networks of social support in the field site (Smyth, 2005).

Scholars have begun to write about the challenges that they faced and the strategies that they used in such difficult field settings. For example, edited volumes have emerged highlighting the special issues involved in conducting field research in particular geographic regions, such as Africa (Thomson, Ansoms, & Murison, 2012), China (Heimer & Thøgersen, 2006; Carlson, Gallagher, Lieberthal, & Manion, 2010), and the Middle East (Clark, 2006). Other scholars have reflected on the specific operational and ethical challenges that working in conflict zones poses (Wood, 2006). Sriram, King, Mertus, Martin-Ortega, and Herman (2009) discuss how to “survive” field research in a variety of dangerous places, and Dolnik (2013) provides a guide to conducting fieldwork on terrorism around the world. This emerging literature offers researchers contemplating field research in challenging contexts an opportunity to read about other scholars’ experiences in similar places and settings. When little has been published about how to operate in a field context where a scholar contemplates working, she might consult doctoral dissertations based on research conducted in that locale. Dissertations often have more extensive discussions of the specific field-site contexts and challenges than articles and books and can be an excellent source of insight. Also, scholars may seek to draw on useful knowledge by directly contacting other researchers who have previously worked in the context that they will be visiting.

Apart from circumstances that would affect any political scientist doing fieldwork, researchers also may face challenges related to their gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity or race, physical disabilities, or other aspects of their personal being and social identity. Gay and lesbian scholars may experience discrimination in some contexts, and even persecution in places where authorities restrict sexual orientation rights and freedoms, such as Russia or Uganda. Women with experience in field research have highlighted the ways in which their gender has presented risks and both opened and closed doors (Golde, 1986; Johnson, 2009; Orbals & Rincker, 2009). To give just one illustration of the scope of these issues: among women who took the FRPS survey, 38% reported that gender inequality had affected the conduct of their field project at least to some extent.

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Whether doing fieldwork in a foreign setting or close to home, the question of how one's identity shapes one's data and findings merits constant reflection. In a vast range of situations, researchers' citizenship, ethnic or racial ancestry, gender, sexual orientation, age, marital status, speech patterns, or other characteristics may influence their interactions with study participants. Shehata (2006), for example, parses out how several aspects of his identity as a male Egyptian-American Muslim, understood as coming from a so-called respectable class background, had specific effects on his ethnographic fieldwork in Egyptian factories. African-American political scientists have written nuanced accounts of the ways in which race, gender, and nationality influenced their research in Mozambique, Uruguay, Ethiopia, and Kenya (Henderson, 2009; Townsend-Bell, 2009; Thompson, 2009). Reinhardt (2009, p. 297) recounts the challenges that she faced as "a white woman studying the Afrobrasilian political movement," especially in dispelling stereotyped impressions that Brazilians had about her. Issues of identity of all kinds, intersectional positionality, and bias thus have a very practical and personal impact on researchers and their experiences in given settings. All scholars should critically reflect on how they, as data collection instruments themselves, and the dynamics of their interactions in the field more generally, influence the nature of the data collected and the conclusions that they draw. Our discipline awaits further published studies of and reflections on these vital topics.

The Ethics of Field Research: Continual Negotiations of Values and Power

As we discuss in the penultimate section of this article, we believe that six interacting principles guide effective field research—and ethical commitment is perhaps chief among them. A commitment to ethical practices involves obligations not merely to one’s own work, but to one’s subjects, institutions, and profession. Operating ethically implies much more than securing the approval of the IRB at one’s home institution and obtaining informed consent from study participants. The ethical conduct of field research requires ongoing (and potentially evolving) recognition of and reflection on one’s values, power, and positionality and how each affects one’s objectives and work (Fujii, 2012; MacLean, 2013).

The important ethical dilemmas that scholars face in the field, and thus should think through in advance of arriving, vary greatly from context to context. Fieldwork in violent or postconflict settings can pose particularly acute ethical challenges, with higher stakes for all involved in the project (Thomson, 2009). Should researchers compensate study participants for their involvement in the research project, and if so, in what form and amount? The location for conducting interviews can likewise present ethical quandaries: what kinds of public or private spaces might facilitate a dialogue but also protect the safety and reputation of both respondent and scholar? How can scholars obtain *meaningfully* informed consent, making sure that study participants fully understand to what they are agreeing and how the information they provide may be used and shared? What should the researcher do if an unwelcome intruder interrupts an interview or focus group meeting and insists on remaining in the room to listen or participate? How can notes and materials be safeguarded throughout and after the study so that participants are not stigmatized or harmed in any way by the research? Scholars must continually develop strategies for addressing these types of issues and many others. Of course, preparing the materials needed to apply to their campus IRB for approval to conduct the study, and interacting with that unit, help scholars to anticipate some of the potential challenges and to be better equipped to adapt when new issues arise in the field (Thomson, 2012). Inevitably, however, some challenges will need to be addressed on the fly, with little time for reflection.

Political scientists generally share an abstract inclination toward ethical practices in the field, but they conceptualize and operationalize this commitment in different ways. Ethical practice can range from a minimalist conception of “do no harm” to a maximalist notion of providing recognizable benefits to study participants. The former could mean keeping study participants’ information confidential when this has been guaranteed, through such actions as carefully anonymizing all interview transcripts, field notes, and records. The latter could mean translating one’s findings into a policy brief to be shared with government officials or activists working on the topic. The three Belmont Report (see

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<https://www.hhs.gov/ohrp/regulations-and-policy/belmont-report/>) principles of respect, justice, and beneficence can provide broad guidelines for navigating the ethical dilemmas that continually arise in the field, helping scholars to think through the risks and benefits to those whom they involve in their work, regardless of their particular approach to ethical practices.

Ethical questions do not end when researchers return home from the field. Scholars must carefully consider the protection of human participants as they incorporate evidence in their writing, share their research data, and disseminate their analysis in publications, blogs, and presentations (Sriram, 2009). Ethical requirements to protect study participants should take priority as scholars consider options for making their data accessible to other researchers and making their research more transparent (Parkinson & Wood, 2015).

Conclusion: Principles of Field Research

As the discussion thus far has highlighted, every fieldwork experience is different—unique and exciting in its own way. Indeed, there is an essential creative element to fieldwork, due in part to its fast-paced and often unpredictable nature, a quality that makes it both stimulating and demanding. Despite these qualities, we have identified myriad common challenges that fieldwork entails and offered a set of strategies and solutions that—adapted to different field contexts—can help scholars to address them. Throughout this article, we also have argued that fieldwork is a powerful form of inquiry that can generate critical insights that enhance our understanding of key political dynamics around the world.

Yet how does one bring about such results, and how can others assess whether one has done so? Is fieldwork more art than science, entirely a matter of personal proclivities and style, and thus idiosyncratic and unevaluable? Or corresponding to the commonalities that we have identified, are most high-quality field research projects marked by certain attributes? Is there a basis for assessing the quality of fieldwork per se, independent of the research publications that it produces? In short, how can those who conduct fieldwork assess whether they are doing so effectively, and how can those who consume its intellectual products assess its effectiveness?

Through analyzing political science publications about and based on field research, as well as our in-depth interviews with and survey of diverse U.S.-based faculty, we have identified a set of six interacting principles that underpin and animate good field research: engagement with context, flexible discipline, triangulation, critical reflection, ethical commitment, and transparency. These principles embody and give voice to political scientists' intuitive sense of what constitutes effective fieldwork, illustrating its time- and resource-intensity. To be clear, these principles do not prescribe any single, simple template for field research. Indeed, we question the possibility (and advisability) of generating a set of fieldwork best practices, given the heterogeneity of our discipline, its forms and types of inquiry, and the contexts in which research is conducted. How these principles are prioritized, combined, and applied will vary across contexts, projects, and scholars. Nonetheless, we believe that the core commonalities underlying field research in the discipline are strong enough to allow us to posit that fieldwork that follows these general principles is more likely to contribute to scholarship that enhances our understanding of the social and political world.

First, engaging with the field context is a critical principle of good fieldwork. Personal proximity to the phenomena, people, and dynamics under study enables scholars to learn from that context, rather than merely collecting disembodied fragments of data. Exactly how scholars “engage with context” varies. For example, doing so might entail lingering with respondents after an interview has ended, perusing record boxes in an archive that surround the one that a scholar searched systematically, closely studying a community prior to carrying out a survey or experiment there, or obtaining an office at a local college

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and absorbing the views and experiences of colleagues there. A scholar's ability to engage effectively with a particular context is not necessarily tied to the amount of time spent there on any particular trip. Extended engagement might not be necessary (though it might be enjoyable!) for scholars who are already deeply knowledgeable of the context prior to the trip. To be sure, profound engagement may create the risk of losing one's critical distance. Nonetheless, scholars who conduct fieldwork often employ multiple strategies throughout their time in the field to reinforce their projects' intellectual and theoretical moorings.

Second, flexible discipline entails consistently pursuing the overarching intellectual goals of one's project while simultaneously adapting to unforeseen challenges and opportunities. The process of generating and using a data collection plan embodies this principle. Such plans can serve as an analytic touchstone through the life of a field research project, aiding scholars as they shift among data collection, analysis, and research design tasks, helping them to prioritize these tasks, and structuring their creativity as they update and revise their field research design. The best of such plans are not overly constraining. Of course, scholars will prioritize flexibility over discipline (and vice versa) at different moments, and some may feel more comfortable favoring one or the other more consistently. Nonetheless, finding a balance between the two will allow scholars to conduct their research most effectively.

As mentioned previously, triangulation—cross-checking across different sources of information—means taking advantage of all the opportunities that a field site provides to contradict (or support) one's measurements, judgments, and hypotheses. Engaging in this type of comparative evaluation builds confidence in the value of a project's findings, contributes to rich, well-grounded political accounts, and ultimately allows scholars to better understand the empirical realities under study. Of course, triangulation is not a panacea. Even when multiple sources converge, researchers must be cautious about drawing conclusions. Also, pursuing multiple types of data for each inferential goal can stretch researchers too thin. These challenges notwithstanding, the opportunities for triangulation that field research provides contribute significantly to its power.

Critical reflection involves active, careful consideration of one's choices, practices, and data, what is being learned during research, and what each individually and all in aggregate mean for one's project. Precisely because doing fieldwork involves so many decisions, large and small, it requires practitioners to assess the consequences of those decisions constantly—particularly as to whether they are enhancing or impeding the research. Critical reflection can entail thinking frankly about positionality and how relationships between researchers and research subjects are inflecting the data and findings. It likewise involves allowing emerging ideas and conclusions to filter back into and inform future analytic decisions. This principle thus lies at the heart of the iterative nature of fieldwork. While we would caution against allowing such reflection to stall or even paralyze one's work, we nonetheless emphasize the value of ongoing self-

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assessment while in the field: critical reflection helps researchers to identify problems before they grow unmanageable and opportunities before they are lost.

As we noted in the section on The Ethics of Field Research, ethical commitment—to people in the field sites that one visits, to the research process, and to other scholars—is a crucial principle of effective fieldwork. Indeed, given the number of lives that scholars often touch while in the field—for a moment, or for much longer—every researcher confronts ethical challenges while conducting research. As we have suggested, scholars might locate themselves at different points along a spectrum of ethical commitment, ranging from a minimalist “do no harm” or risk-reducing approach to a more ambitious notion of beneficence, reciprocity, and a commitment to ensuring that one’s work has some positive impact. Of course, power dynamics do not always render research subjects vulnerable; further, scholars must take care not to allow the worry about all the ethical conundra that fieldwork may present to consume them. That said, intentionally choosing—and remaining actively committed to—one’s ethical values are elements of effective fieldwork.

Conducting research in a way that scholarship based on it can be open and transparent is a final principle of effective field research. Doing so entails documenting and justifying choices made as one collects, generates, and analyzes data in the field. Being transparent in these ways helps fieldworkers to operate more systematically and to learn from each other about the conduct of fieldwork. Doing so allows authors to more clearly substantiate claims and conclusions, and to make their work more complete, understandable, and evaluable. Of course, transparency has reasonable limits. A good rule of thumb is that scholars should spend less time documenting their research than doing it; moreover, it is sometimes impossible for scholars to share either their research data or information about the way that an inquiry was conducted due to ethical or legal constraints. Nonetheless, we believe that openness and transparency should be a goal for scholars who generate their own data through fieldwork.

To be clear, we are not suggesting that each of the principles just discussed is equally salient at every moment of the research process. The principles relate to each other in complicated ways and may sometimes be in tension with one another—as our reference to the potential conflict between transparency and ethical commitment suggests, for instance. Nonetheless, because the principles reinforce more than contradict one another, they comprise a firm foundation for field research in the discipline. They serve as guidelines for conducting fieldwork effectively, offer a basis for the development of a common language to talk about field research and to illustrate its effectiveness, and comprise general criteria for the disciplinary evaluation of these critical research practices.

For decades, political scientists from all subfields have engaged in diverse types of field research around the world. Fortunately, our discipline is becoming more engaged in ongoing dialogue within the social sciences about the practices, principles, and promise

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of field research and its role in the production of knowledge. Indeed, field research involves a diverse range of issues that will inevitably form the basis for disciplinary discussion and debate for many years to come.

From a practical point of view, how can scholars thoroughly prepare for fieldwork in ways that accommodate its fundamentally dynamic nature? How can the data collection techniques that political scientists employ be enhanced and adapted to various challenging contexts? What opportunities and pitfalls do social media create? Yet more fundamental questions also loom. We need to think seriously about how to train graduate students to engage in effective fieldwork, given strong institutional pressures for timely completion of their degrees. It is likewise critical that we develop strategies to adapt to the uncertainty of the current and future funding environments. As a discipline, we should develop mechanisms to acknowledge and incentivize effective fieldwork at each stage of a scholar's career—graduate school, tenure, promotion, and beyond. We hope that the reconceptualization of fieldwork and the reconsideration of its value that we have offered here will spark critical reflection on its virtues and power, lend energy and impetus to emerging conversations within the discipline of political science, and inspire scholars to write and publish about their own fieldwork experiences and the conduct of fieldwork more generally.

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Notes:

(1.) The Field Research in Political Science project asked a random sample of political science faculty members at colleges and universities across the United States to answer questions about their field research experiences in a survey conducted in late 2011 and early 2012. All told, 1,142 people took the survey, giving specifics about 1,468 individual field research projects (Kapiszewski et al., 2015, pp. 412–415).

(2.) Moreover, most of the literature on fieldwork (and thus most definitions of the practice) have been penned by scholars outside of political science.

(3.) See, for example, Emerson (1983).

(4.) The median field research project in the United States reported in the FRPS survey involved a total of seven weeks in the field, often spread over multiple trips. For projects involving international locations, median total time-in-field was a half-year.

(5.) Our definition is not all-encompassing; for instance, it excludes such research techniques as online surveys, downloading preexisting survey data, and phone or Skype interviews conducted from one's office. Likewise, if a scholar is managing a survey in another context from her home institution, the individuals who are actually conducting the survey interviews are carrying out field research, but the scholar herself is not.

(6.) All other subfields combined constituted 22% of the sample. (Because 11.5% of respondents identified no primary subfield and 8.7% selected more than one primary subfield, these numbers do not sum to 100%.)

(7.) On interpretivism, see, for instance, Yanow and Schwartz-Shea (2006), particularly the authors' introduction.

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(8.) Our survey respondents reported using a combination of approaches in about 74% of projects: they employed both qualitative and quantitative analytic methods in 41% of projects and used qualitative, quantitative, *and* interpretive approaches in a full 18% of projects. Game-theoretic approaches were found in less than 6% of the projects.

(9.) Short courses taught in connection with the American Political Science Association annual meeting, and at the Institute for Qualitative and Multi-Method Research that occurs each June at Syracuse University, represent important exceptions.

(10.) While there is a rich and valuable body of literature in other social science disciplines that should be engaged, such as Amit (2000), Emerson (2001), Bailey (2006), Lofland, Snow, Anderson, and Lofland (2005), Perecman and Curran (2006), and Borneman and Hammoudi (2009), the questions that scholars in other disciplines ask, the epistemological commitments they hold, and the analytic methods they employ often differ from those of political scientists.

(11.) The notion of a data collection plan originated with the idea of a “to-get list,” developed by the first trio of scholars to teach the APSA Short Course on “Strategies for Field Research in Comparative and International Politics” from 2001–2003: Evan Lieberman, Julia Lynch, and Marc Morjé Howard. See Lieberman, Howard, and Lynch (2004). The data collection plan discussed here expands this initial idea by emphasizing the dynamic and iterative updating of the plan, as well as its potential adaptation.

(12.) See also the symposium on ethnography and participant observation edited by Peregrine Schwartz-Shea and Samantha Majic in *PS: Political Science & Politics*, January 2017 (Vol. 50, issue 1).

(13.) One notorious case involved multiple scholars (the so-called Xinjiang 13) who were banned from China after contributing chapters to a book on the country’s sensitive Uighur region that raised hackles within the Chinese government. A Bloomberg story examined this in detail, and one of the affected scholars reflected on it. See also Thomson’s discussion of being detained by government authorities while conducting research in postgenocide Rwanda (Thomson 2012, 2013).

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